

Shaping Ends: Reflections on Fukuyama

Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* has been widely regarded as a celebration of the triumph of the West.¹ Its message, on the accepted view, is that, with victory in the Cold War and the death of Communism, the Western way of life has emerged as the culmination of humanity's historical evolution. As the end state towards which that evolution has been tending it represents a pattern of universal validity, a light to itself and to all non-Western societies still struggling in history. It will be argued here that this interpretation is wholly misconceived and, indeed, that it must be stood on its head to obtain the true meaning of the book. The distinctive core of what the West stands for, in Fukuyama's view, is liberal democracy. What his book tells us is that this is itself a transitory historical form, the process of whose dissolution is already well advanced. It is a verdict inescapably grounded in the logic of the argument, in the fundamental tenets of the philosophy of history Fukuyama espouses. Thus, in the classic style of that subject, he arrives on the scene too late, when a way of life has grown old

beyond hope of rejuvenation. There is a sharp irony in the fact that philosophy's grey on grey should be taken in this case as an expression of maturity and vigour. Something is owed here to the complex perversity of the times, but something also, it must be admitted, to the strangely half-hearted, double-minded and inadequately self-conscious way in which Fukuyama has approached his task. All this constitutes, however, a reason not for abandoning the agenda he has set but for taking it onwards towards completion.

Liberal Democracy in Question

The thesis of Fukuyama's book on the usual reading is that history has now come to an end with the definitive victory of what might be called capitalist democracy or democratic capitalism; that is, of the combination of capitalism and liberal democracy. Although this reading cannot be sustained it must be acknowledged to have some rather obvious textual support. For a preliminary view of the scene its support and then the evidence that tells just as plainly against it will be sketched. These conflicting indications fix the terms of the discussion that follows.

In restating and defending an earlier version of Fukuyama's position, he tells us that what he had suggested had come to an end was 'not the occurrence of events, even large and grave events, but History: that is, history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times'.² The process is one that 'dictates a common evolutionary pattern for *all* human societies—in short, something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy'.³ Fukuyama is, quite generally, still more confident that it is an evolution in the direction of capitalism, an outcome 'in some sense inevitable for advanced countries'.⁴ Hence it is that 'We who live in stable, long-standing liberal democracies . . . have trouble imagining a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist'.⁵ This inability to imagine alternatives is itself a large part of the substance of the belief that we in the contemporary West are living at the end of history. It seems clear that Fukuyama's commitment to this belief is sufficiently well advertised as to explain and excuse what was referred to earlier as the usual reading of his book. Indeed, it is reasonable to speak in this connection of its official doctrine or, more strictly, of the first version of that doctrine.⁶

The book also contains formulations which cannot be reconciled with

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (EH), London 1992.

² EH, p. XII.

³ EH, p. 48.

⁴ EH, p. 98; cf. p. 90.

⁵ EH, p. 46.

⁶ In an earlier article I wrote of an 'exoteric' and an 'esoteric' version of Fukuyama's position. But this way of putting things makes assumptions about his intentions which cannot be justified here. Nothing will be lost by simply distinguishing between an official doctrine or doctrines and what is implied by the deeper logic of the argument, without imputing any particular degree of selfconsciousness to the author. See Joseph McCarney, 'Endgame', *Radical Philosophy* 62, autumn 1992, pp. 35–38.

this version or, indeed, with any end of history thesis. They seem to gain in urgency as it proceeds so that its final chapter is ready to suggest the following conclusion:

No regime—no 'socio-economic system'—is able to satisfy all men in all places. This includes liberal democracy . . . Thus those who remain dissatisfied will always have the potential to restart history.⁷

The last paragraph of the book points the moral by affirming that 'the evidence available to us now' concerning the direction in which the wagon train of history is wandering 'must remain provisionally inconclusive'. Fukuyama takes leave of us on the following still more judicious and sombre note:

Nor can we in the final analysis know, provided a majority of the wagons eventually reach the same town, whether their occupants, having looked around a bit at their new surroundings, will not find them inadequate and set their eyes on a new and more distant journey.⁸

This scepticism embodies what might be called the second version of Fukuyama's official doctrine. It seems plain that his book contains some large, even structural, tensions. What we need is a principle that will render these conflicting appearances intelligible, some key to the underlying predicament to which they are a confused and confusing response. To obtain it might even enable us to see which appearances can claim the greater authenticity, in the sense of being closer to Fukuyama's primary intellectual impulse and orientation. If any progress is to be made we shall have to consider the 'mechanisms' he relies on, in his role as a philosopher of 'Universal History', to provide a motive force and a direction for the historical process.

There are two such devices. The first is the logic of modern natural science, establishing a 'constantly changing horizon of production possibilities' for which capitalism has proved to be the most efficient means of realization.⁹ Then, to take the story on from capitalism to liberal democracy, there is the age-old struggle of human beings for 'recognition'. The claims Fukuyama makes for the first of these, though no doubt contentious enough in themselves, do not give rise to the kinds of internal difficulties we now seek to explore. They constitute what he is content to allow is essentially an economic, indeed 'a kind of Marxist' interpretation of history. It leads, however, he insists, to 'a completely non-Marxist conclusion', to capitalism and not communism as the end state.¹⁰ This position is confidently and consistently maintained. Things are different with what Fukuyama acknowledges to be the 'most difficult' part of the argument, the transition to liberal democracy.¹¹

The theme of the desire for recognition is, according to Fukuyama, as

⁷ EH, p. 334.

⁸ EH, p. 339.

⁹ EH, p. 77; cf. p. 91.

¹⁰ EH, p. 131.

¹¹ EH, p. 109.

old as Western political philosophy. Its first major statement is Plato's account of *thymos*, the 'spirited' aspect or part of the soul. Thereafter it emerges in various guises in the thought of, among others, Macchiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Hegel and Nietzsche.¹² The immediate source of Fukuyama's use of it is, however, Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel where it has a central role. The classic formulation of the theme, in Kojève's view, is the master-slave dialectic of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, an episode that is for him the key to Hegel's entire philosophy of history. In Kojève's version of that philosophy the substance of human history is constituted by the struggle for recognition of fighting masters and toiling slaves. These struggles are necessarily unavailing, essentially because the slave, being a slave, can neither receive nor confer a humanly satisfying recognition. In the course of historical time, however, and specifically through the French Revolution and its aftermath, the contradictions of mastery and slavery are dialectically overcome. Both are transcended in equal citizenship in what Kojève calls the 'universal and homogeneous state' whose prototype is the Napoleonic Empire. Here every individual receives 'universal' recognition as 'a Citizen enjoying all political rights and as a "juridical person" of the civil law.'¹³ The achievement of this fully satisfying form of recognition brings history to an end by, as it were, switching off the motor of its movement.

For Fukuyama to appropriate this body of thought he has to make a simple, strategic assumption. It is that 'we can understand' Kojève's universal and homogeneous state as liberal democracy.¹⁴ The crux of the matter is then easy to state: 'Kojève's claim that we are at the end of history . . . stands or falls on the strength of the assertion that the recognition provided by the contemporary liberal democratic state adequately satisfies the human desire for recognition.'¹⁵ The incisiveness of this formulation is, unfortunately, not matched by Fukuyama's response. Indeed, he never manages thereafter to hold the question steadily in his sights, still less to provide an unequivocal and authoritative answer. This failure is the chief source of the impression of systematic ambiguity left by his book. For the issue at stake, the satisfactoriness of liberal democratic recognition, is the best clue to the array of conflicting appearances it presents. Moreover, to survey the variety of views Fukuyama seems to endorse on it is not simply to encounter a medley of contending strains, all with much the same claim to be the true voice of their author. Instead we find on one side a line of thought that seems lifeless, blinkered, without much sense of personal involvement. On the other there is a strong thread of argument, drawn out with energy, individuality and full awareness. It confronts and seems able to rebut in its own terms the claims of the first side without meeting any answering denial or even engagement. Hence, the theme of recognition can shed light on the question raised

¹² EH, p. 162.

¹³ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, London 1980, pp. 40, 237.

¹⁴ EH, p. XXI.

¹⁵ EH, p. 207.

earlier of authenticity, of which are the deep and which the shallow features of Fukuyama's position.

The Influence of Leo Strauss

There is, to begin with, a line of thought comprising the indications that Fukuyama accepts the essentials of Kojève's case. That he is in some measure disposed to do so is hardly surprising since they provide the theoretical basis of his official doctrine in its first version. Thus, for much of the time he seems content to take over the substance of Kojève, giving it a liberal democratic gloss. In this frame of mind the liberal democratic state is conceived of as providing a fully satisfying recognition on Kojèvan lines. That is to say, it recognizes all human beings universally 'by granting and protecting their *rights*'.¹⁶ Recognition becomes reciprocal 'when the state and the people recognize each other, that is, when the state grants its citizens rights and when citizens agree to abide by the state's laws'.¹⁷ At times Fukuyama even outdoes Kojève in propounding the merits of this arrangement, as in the claim, surely absurd on any literal reading, that 'The liberal democratic state values us at our own sense of self-worth'.¹⁸ We seem here to be firmly grounded in the brave new, and historically final, world of liberal democracy. Yet a different and deeper note soon intrudes, growing more insistent as the discussion proceeds. To appreciate it fully one has to take account of another element in the intellectual background of Fukuyama's work. This is the presence there of Kojève's major critic and interlocutor, Leo Strauss. Their debate was sustained for over thirty years, chiefly by means of a correspondence which has now reached the public realm in the second edition of Strauss's *On Tyranny*.¹⁹ The influence of Strauss on Fukuyama is much less prominently advertised than is that of Kojève, surfacing only in copious footnotes. Yet it is no less significant.²⁰ Indeed, Fukuyama's book may be read as the record of a struggle in which the latter has the better of things in the end. To read it in terms of this unacknowledged drama is to gain an otherwise unobtainable perspective on its many evasions and equivocations.

A striking feature of the Strauss–Kojève debate is the urbane yet implacable resistance Strauss offers to the idea that recognition by the universal, homogeneous state brings history to a credible or satisfactory end. Against it he mounts a whole battery of objections which are for the most part not fully worked out or integrated but still ingenious and fertile in a high degree. They anticipate Fukuyama's discussion with considerable exactness and prove to be the basic instrument of breaking down his attachment to Kojève. When doubts about Kojèvan recognition begin to arise for Fukuyama it is plain that Strauss's contribution is in the forefront of his thoughts. He refers to it in a

¹⁶ EH, p. 202.

¹⁷ EH, p. 203.

¹⁸ EH, p. 200.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (eds), New York 1991, pp. 213–325.

²⁰ It may be worth noting that the influences here are mediated by the person of Allan Bloom, as pupil of Strauss, editor of Kojève and teacher of Fukuyama.

note and the text provides what is essentially a restatement.²¹ His doubts centre, just as Strauss's did, on the issue of universality. The question, as formulated by Fukuyama, is whether recognition that can be universalized is 'worth having in the first place' and whether the quality of recognition may not be 'far more important' than its universality.²² Echoing Strauss's concern with 'great men' he asks whether the 'humble sort of recognition' embodied in the granting of liberal rights would be satisfying for the few who had 'infinitely more ambitious natures'.²³ These are people driven by what Fukuyama calls *megalothymia*; that is, 'the desire to be recognized as better than others'.²⁴ The Straussian movement of thought is re-enacted at the next stage when Fukuyama wonders whether even if everyone was fully content merely by virtue of having rights in a democratic society, with no further aspirations beyond citizenship, we would not in fact find such people 'worthy of contempt'.²⁵ Following Strauss, he invokes Nietzsche's image of the 'last man' to convey the spiritual emptiness and torpor of this situation. It is a world in which, for Strauss, 'man loses his humanity', that which 'raises man above the brutes', and in which, for Fukuyama, there are 'no longer human beings but animals of the genus *homo sapiens*'.²⁶ The moral is succinctly drawn by Strauss: 'If the universal and homogeneous state is the goal of History, History is absolutely "tragic"'.²⁷

Taken together Strauss's objections constitute a formidable case. Yet it is one which Kojève never seriously attempts to address.²⁸ Indeed, the strangely inflexible, all-or-nothing cast of his thought makes it difficult to see how he might have done so. The entire structure rests on an analysis of Hegelian desire which sees what is distinctively human as 'Desire that is directed towards Desire as Desire'; that is, according to Kojève, desire for recognition.²⁹ This can, he argues, be 'definitively' satisfied only by realizing a universal recognition whose uniquely appropriate source is 'Universality incarnated in the State as such'.³⁰ Thus we arrive at a vision of the end of history whose formalism, abstraction and simplicity have aroused much comment.³¹ In it only two kinds of entity figure, individual citizens and the state, each accepting and confirming the juridical status of the other. The push

²¹ EH, p. 386n.

²² EH, p. 301; Strauss, pp. 209–210.

²³ EH, p. 302; Strauss p. 238.

²⁴ EH, p. 304.

²⁵ EH, p. 302; Strauss, pp. 207–208.

²⁶ EH, p. 312; Strauss, pp. 208, 239.

²⁷ Strauss, p. 208.

²⁸ As Strauss complains, some twenty-five years into their correspondence; Strauss, p. 291.

²⁹ Kojève, p. 144. Following Fukuyama, we shall not inquire how far Kojève's interpretation of Hegel is correct but simply assume 'a new synthetic philosopher named Hegel–Kojève', EH, p. 144. For some doubts about Kojève on Hegelian 'desire' see, however, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, New Haven 1976, p. 62n.

³⁰ Kojève, p. 40, p. 58.

³¹ Most effectively from Perry Anderson whose epithets these are. Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, London, Verso, 1992, p. 323. Fukuyama comes to have similar misgivings; see below.

towards extremes in Kojève's thought is, as Strauss perceived, most fully realized in the conception of the individual in the end state. Human action is properly speaking, for Kojève, the negation of the given in the service of desire. Where desire is definitively satisfied this motivation loses its force, and action in the full, historical sense fades from the scene. Since, however, negating action is the hallmark of our humanity what this implies is nothing less than 'the disappearance of Man at the end of History' and the emergence of an 'animal in *barmony* with Nature or given Being'.³² Thus, Kojève is, at least sometimes, prepared to accept, even to celebrate, the condition of the 'last man' so deplored by Strauss. The pure, intense character of this eschatology is achieved, it must be said, only at the cost of an aridity and brittleness that seem unlikely to commend it widely. At least the strain of maintaining it proves too much for Fukuyama as he comes under the pressure of Straussian scepticism. His retreat may be seen from one point of view as a tribute to his realism and sensitivity to a range of conflicting considerations. Yet it shows also his curious tendency to register them by simply incorporating the alternatives into his text, so that they lie down side by side without any movement of integration or mediation. Thus the thin consistency of Kojève is replaced by a richer incoherence. More significantly for immediate purposes is the consequent erosion of the basis of Fukuyama's first official doctrine, a process one may now trace to its conclusion.

Cold Monsters

A second Nietzschean tag invoked by Fukuyama will convey the spirit of the discussion. It is the reference to the state as 'the coldest of all cold monsters', an estimate whose implications for hopes of satisfying recognition are easy to gauge. Recognition by the state, Fukuyama tells us in drawing them out, is 'necessarily impersonal'. The contrast is with 'community life' which involves a 'much more immediately satisfying', 'much more individual', sort of recognition, based not just on universal 'personness' but on 'a host of particular qualities that together make up one's being'.³³ What we really want, it seems, is an individual and inescapably heterogeneous recognition, geared to the specificity of our particular existences, which the state by its very nature, its universal, homogeneous mode of operation, cannot provide. Significantly, Kojève comes in for direct criticism at this point in the argument. In modern times, Fukuyama suggests, citizenship is best exercised through 'so-called "mediating institutions"', the vast range of civic associations from political parties to literary societies.³⁴ This is a truth which was well understood by Hegel, though not by Kojève:

In this respect Hegel is quite different from Kojève's interpretation of him. Kojève's universal and homogeneous state makes no room for 'mediating' bodies like corporations or *Stände*; the very adjectives Kojève uses to describe his end state suggest a more Marxist vision of a society where

³² Kojève, p. 159n. He later had 'a radical change of opinion on this point' as a result of a visit to Japan. Kojève, pp. 159–62n.

³³ EH, p. 323.

³⁴ EH, p. 322.

there is nothing between free, equal, and atomized individuals and the state.³⁵

The question of what is 'more Marxist' about such a vision may be set aside here, except to note the obvious distancing function of that description. What is important is that we appear to be at a strategic turning point in the argument. For Kojève's abstract statism is surely being decisively rejected. The comments on it have every appearance of constituting a considered verdict, reached through a prolonged engagement, not to say infatuation, with its object. It crowns a spirited and committed movement of thought and the position being criticized is never rehabilitated thereafter. This is as close as we shall get to noting an authentic, principled shift in Fukuyama's thinking. It provides both an obituary for his Kojévianism and a clear indication of an alternative way forward. If the thesis that history ends in liberal democracy is to be sustained it is plainly not to the liberal democratic state that we should look for a consummating satisfaction. Instead we have to turn to the sphere of community life with its host of mediating institutions, to what is today generally referred to as 'civil society'.

This move runs immediately, however, into difficulties of its own. Although a strong community life may be 'democracy's best guarantee that its citizens do not turn into last men' it is, Fukuyama observes, 'constantly threatened in contemporary societies'.³⁶ What he has in mind are the societies of 'Anglo-Saxon' liberalism in particular and of Western liberal democracy more generally. The root cause of their plight, as seen by Fukuyama, is the tendency to conceive of community in purely contractual terms, as a device to safeguard the rights and minister to the interests of individuals. These rights are themselves interpreted in ways that are destructive of the possibility of a rich common life. The democratic principle of equality is, in its boundless tolerance of alternatives, opposed to 'the kind of exclusivity engendered by strong and cohesive communities'.³⁷ The principle of liberty ensures, among other things, that any contract of association may be freely abrogated when it fails to bring the expected benefits to the individual contractors.³⁸ Matters are made worse by the workings of liberal economic principles which 'provide no support for traditional communities' but, quite the contrary, 'tend to atomize and separate people'.³⁹ Hence it is that all forms of associational life from the family to 'the largest association, the country itself' come to lead a precarious existence, at constant risk of being emptied of their substantial, inner meaning. This is a disappointing outcome of the shift in Fukuyama's argument. The search for satisfying recognition had led away from that cold monster, the state, towards the promised warmth of community life. In Western societies, however, this promise has turned out to be illusory. All we encounter is the chilliness of contract, of arrangements instrumentally calculated to meet the needs of self-interested, atomic individuals. The true spirit of community, and

³⁵ EH, p. 388n. At this point the fiction of Hegel-Kojève has completely broken down.

³⁶ EH, p. 323.

³⁷ EH, p. 324.

³⁸ EH, p. 324.

³⁹ EH, p. 325.

hence the possibility of recognition in and through community, cannot reside in, or be sustained by, such arrangements.

Fukuyama's thinking about these matters has another important dimension to consider. It consists in his awareness of a viable, indeed flourishing, alternative, even at the supposed end of history, to liberal democracy. Earlier he had noted that Asian societies offer a sense of community conspicuously absent from the contemporary United States.⁴⁰ Their 'community-orientedness', it now appears, is grounded not in contracts between self-interested parties but in religion or some near-substitute such as Confucianism.⁴¹ The recognition they provide is a kind of 'group recognition' that is vanishing from the West. What the individual works for is the recognition that the group accords him and the recognition of the group by other groups.⁴² He derives his status 'primarily not on the basis of his individual ability or worth, but insofar as he is a member of one of a series of interlocking groups'.⁴³ The resulting emphasis on group harmony has, Fukuyama acknowledges, implications for political life. Even Japanese democracy looks, he observes, somewhat authoritarian by American or European standards, while elsewhere in Asia authoritarianism of a more overt variety is widespread.⁴⁴ Here we witness the raising of a spectre that comes increasingly to haunt the pages of Fukuyama's book. The manner in which his focus gradually shifts from West to East in pursuit of it is itself a major aspect, as well as a symbol, of the complex dislocations that characterize the work.

The haunting power of this vision can be fully appreciated only if one notes another factor in the situation. It takes one back to the first of Fukuyama's historical mechanisms, 'the logic of advanced industrialization determined by modern natural science'. It is a logic which, according to a constant theme in his work, 'creates a strong predisposition in favour of capitalism and market economics'.⁴⁵ He is equally constant in holding that it has no such tendency to favour liberal democracy. Indeed, democracy is, he assures us, 'almost never chosen for economic reasons'.⁴⁶ More emphatically still, it has 'no *economic* rationale' and 'if anything, democratic politics is a drag on economic efficiency'.⁴⁷ The reasons for this are in part rather familiar ones which have been articulated by Lee Kuan Yew and, in a more sophisticated form, by Joseph Schumpeter. The basic idea is that democracy interferes with economic rationality in decision making. It does so through its tendency to indulge in policies that sacrifice growth and low inflation to requirements of redistribution and current consumption.⁴⁸ In addition Fukuyama employs a more interesting and

⁴⁰ EH, p. 242.

⁴¹ EH, p. 323.

⁴² EH, p. 231.

⁴³ EH, p. 238.

⁴⁴ EH, pp. 240–41. Its most prominent advocate is Lee Kuan Yew who has argued that 'a form of paternalistic authoritarianism is more in keeping with Asia's Confucian traditions' than is liberal democracy. EH, p. 241.

⁴⁵ EH, p. 109.

⁴⁶ EH, p. 134.

⁴⁷ EH, p. 205.

⁴⁸ EH, pp. 123–24, 241.

distinctive line of reasoning. It holds that 'the individual self-interest at the heart of Western liberal economic theory may be an inferior source of motivation to certain forms of group interest'. Hence it is that 'the highly atomistic economic liberalism of the United States or Britain' becomes 'economically counter-productive' at a certain point. It does so when it begins to erode the work ethic on which capitalist prosperity ultimately depends.⁴⁹ Thus, the logic of the industrialization process would seem to point neither to liberal democracy nor to socialism but to what Fukuyama calls 'the truly winning combination' of liberal economics and authoritarian politics; that is to a 'market-oriented authoritarianism'.⁵⁰ This projection of theory is, in his view, fully in line with the empirical evidence, for instance, the historical record of authoritarian modernizers as against their democratic counterparts.⁵¹ It is borne out most strikingly by the contrast between the lack of 'economic functionality' shown by democracy in America in recent years and the economic success, indeed economic miracle, achieved by neo-Confucian, authoritarian capitalism in South-East Asia.⁵²

It is time to draw some threads of this discussion together. The nub of the matter, it is now clear, is that both of Fukuyama's historical regulators lead decisively away from liberal democracy. That system is economically dysfunctional and cannot provide satisfying recognition either. In each case the root cause of failure is the same, the radical individualism that corrodes the ties of community on which, ultimately, meaningful recognition and economic success alike depend. A less triumphal message would be hard to conceive. It tells us that the contemporary Western way of life is doomed, just as communism was and for essentially the same reason, an inability to resolve the fundamental contradictions of desire which have driven human history up to now. To point this out is in a sense to reach the outer limits of a programme of showing what may with confidence be inferred on the basis of Fukuyama's argument. It is, however, a verdict of a somewhat negative kind. Given that we in the contemporary West are not experiencing the end of history, it is natural to wonder whether anything more positive might be said about the significance of the stretch of historical time through which we are passing. The complex theoretical apparatus Fukuyama has assembled might after all be expected to have some kind of intelligible perspective to offer on the current wanderings of history's wagon train. To raise this issue is to be brought up at once against the looming presence of the alternative form of capitalism he calls 'market-oriented authoritarianism'. The status of, and prospects for, this system need a closer look.

Western Weakness/Eastern Strength

A background is provided here by the speculation Fukuyama engages in concerning the present outlook for world history. It centres on what he plausibly takes to be the key issue, the future of Asia and, in

⁴⁹ EH, p. 233, p. 335.

⁵⁰ EH, p. 123.

⁵¹ EH, p. 123.

⁵² EH, pp. 41, 100-101, 124.

particular, of Japan. The position of Japan is consistently ambiguous in his scheme, being sometimes treated as a representative liberal democracy and sometimes held apart from that category. The ambiguity has a dynamic aspect. For Fukuyama believes that Japan, and Asia more generally, are 'at a particularly critical turning point with respect to world history'. On the one side lies the Western road of universal and reciprocal recognition, the universal rights of man and woman, formal liberal democracy, personal dignity, private consumption and a decline in the importance of groups. On the other side, 'a systematic illiberal and non-democratic alternative combining economic rationalism with paternalistic authoritarianism' may gain ground.⁵³ Formally at least Fukuyama wishes to treat these options as genuinely open. The tone and tendency of his account are, however, decidedly pessimistic. Thus he lists certain conditions under which the authoritarian option would become the more likely. Yet on his own showing the important ones are already firmly in place. These are faltering economic growth in America and Europe relative to the Far East and the continuing progressive breakdown in Western societies of basic social institutions like the family. It is entirely in line with this strand of thinking that he should suggest that 'the beginnings of a systematic Asian rejection of liberal democracy' can now be heard.⁵⁴ Plainly he is deeply alarmed by this prospect. A satisfactory response cannot, however, be yielded just by empirical speculation concerning likely and unlikely scenarios. It is necessary to ask what theoretical resources there might be for meeting the challenge. The question is whether Fukuyama has a principled means of rebutting the claim of market-oriented authoritarianism to represent the direction in which world history is currently moving, or even to constitute its final destination. For the spectre that haunts the later part of his book is in its most chilling form the possibility that he has simply misidentified the end state, that the end of history thesis will stand provided that authoritarian is substituted for democratic capitalism as the final form of human society.

At first sight it may seem that Fukuyama does have theoretical means of resisting the claims of authoritarian capitalism. This is suggested by the charge, apparently directed at the very roots of that system, that 'Recognition based on groups is ultimately irrational.'⁵⁵ On some accounts of the role of reason in history it must be allowed that this charge would have considerable weight. Indeed, if it could be upheld it would be decisive for the crucial issue of whether a system founded on irrational recognition might be indefinitely self-sustaining. Fukuyama's conception of reason lays claim, however, to no such ontological significance. Although never laid out systematically, it has in practice both a Humean and a Kantian aspect. In the first of them, the 'slave of the passions' view, reason figures as the minister of desire, a device for adapting means to ends set independently of it.⁵⁶ Where recognition is concerned it is, however, the second aspect that

⁵³ EH, pp. 242–43.

⁵⁴ EH, p. 243.

⁵⁵ EH, p. 242; cf. pp. 201, 266, 337.

⁵⁶ EH, pp. 185, 334.

is important. Rational recognition, Fukuyama tells us, is 'recognition on a universal basis in which the dignity of each person as a free and autonomous human being is recognized by all'.⁵⁷ It is, one might say, the equal recognition of all persons as Kantian moral subjects. Fukuyama is fully aware that group recognition does not meet this specification. It is by its very nature restricted, not universal, and granted in virtue of group membership, not of free, autonomous individuality as such.⁵⁸ Given the theoretical assumptions at work here, the assertion that group recognition is irrational emerges as a conceptual truth, indeed virtually a tautology. It can yield no substantive grounds for doubting the viability of a social system based on such recognition. Neither does one obtain such grounds if, like Fukuyama, one supplements it with a normative preference for universal over group recognition. Adding a Kantian ought to a Kantian definition in this way may well seem natural, even self-evidently justified, to people of a liberal outlook. Moreover, it might well provide a starting point for a critique of group recognition, a set of reasons for thinking it undesirable or unworthy. Such an argument would not of itself, however, comprise or form part of an explanation of why a system founded on it could not sustain itself, or even why it might not prove to be the final goal of human history.

The search for that explanation is in any case radically subverted by another feature of Fukuyama's account. This is the recurring suggestion that rational recognition cannot exist on its own since 'the emergence and durability of a society embodying rational recognition appears to *require* the survival of certain forms of irrational recognition'.⁵⁹ In slightly more concrete terms we are told that 'it appears to be the case that rational recognition is not self-sustaining, but must rely on pre-modern, non-universal forms of recognition to function properly'.⁶⁰ For real vitality and staying power we have, it seems, to look to irrational, that is group, recognition. The rational, universal kind appears by contrast as a parasitic form, dependent on a source of life outside itself. The social and political implications of this relationship surface occasionally in the text:

Group rather than universal recognition can be a better support for both economic activity and community life . . . not only is universal recognition not universally satisfying, but the ability of liberal democratic societies to establish and sustain themselves on a rational basis over the long term is open to some doubt.⁶¹

These implications are tentatively drawn, as they have to be to keep any semblance of congruity with Fukuyama's official views. Yet his fears for the future of liberal democracy flow directly, it should now be clear, from the underlying logic of his theory of history and find no countervailing reassurance there. They may be said to represent the deepest strand of thought in his book. In this light liberal democracy

⁵⁷ EH, p. 200.

⁵⁸ EH, p. 238.

⁵⁹ EH, p. 207.

⁶⁰ EH, p. 334.

⁶¹ EH, p. 335.

appears as an inherently precarious achievement without strong roots in the basic structure of human desires, a familiar kind of liberal nightmare. It is rather the product of quite specific historical conditions which are now in a process of dissolution. To this diagnosis Fukuyama has added what might be termed the dialectical insight that the seeds of the process lie within. The societies of radical individualism are being consumed by the very forces which made them possible in the first place. Thus the process is essentially one of self-destruction, and all the more inexorable on that account. With the surface froth removed this is a bleak vision, an announcement with elaborate theoretical backing that it really is closing time in the gardens of the West.

The Problems of Inequality

A reference was made earlier to conceptions of history which allow reason a larger role than Fukuyama envisages. The obvious case in point is that of Hegel, ultimately the dominant intellectual influence in Fukuyama's book. The issue is the subject of some of Hegel's most dramatic pronouncements, as when he affirms that history is a rational process because reason is active in it as 'substance and infinite power'.⁶² It might be supposed that the most direct way to draw out the implications of this doctrine for Fukuyama's problems is through the concept of freedom. The workings of reason in history constitute the ground of Hegel's canonical description of it as 'the progress of the consciousness of freedom'. They do so in virtue of the complex dialectical relationships believed to obtain in this area, in particular the idea that self-conscious freedom *consists in* reason.⁶³ There are ample theoretical resources here for dealing with the suggestion that history might conceivably end in some form of collectivist authoritarianism, an outcome that would be the very antithesis of rational, self-conscious freedom. It may be more appropriate at present, however, to turn to a different aspect of the Hegelian background. For Fukuyama makes no claim to take on board the historical ontology of freedom and reason. In his conception reason is, as we have seen, either instrumental calculation or universal predictability, and freedom is the 'negative' liberty enshrined in individual rights of the classic liberal tradition. However important it might be in a full-scale discussion to examine Hegel's quite different treatment of these categories, doing so now would lead sharply away from our concerns. It is in any case more in the spirit of Hegelian critique to seek to view Fukuyama's work immanently in its own terms. What this implies in particular is that we should attend to elements in the legacy of Hegel which Fukuyama does explicitly endorse and seek to appropriate. The obvious candidate is the concept of recognition, itself the main pivot on which the intellectual structure of his book turns. The social and political dimensions of the concept are better explored here in terms of equality rather than freedom. To do so should provide an equally effective handle on the question of the viability of authoritarian capitalism. For that system is marked as much by inequality as by unfreedom,

⁶² G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trs. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1980, p. 27.

⁶³ Hegel, *Lectures*, p. 144.

and whatever a theory of history has to say about its status and prospects can be mediated as well by the one route as the other. As we shall see, freedom will not be left entirely behind, a fact that reflects its inescapable position at the centre of the entire conceptual field.

The question of inequality arises for Fukuyama chiefly in connection with the charge 'from the Left' that 'the promise of universal, reciprocal recognition remains essentially unfulfilled in liberal societies'. It does so, the charge runs, because 'economic inequality brought about by capitalism *ipso facto* implies unequal recognition'.⁶⁴ The pages in which Fukuyama deals with this criticism are among the least coherent in his book. On the one hand we are told that the problems of inequality are 'in a certain sense, unresolvable within the context of liberalism'.⁶⁵ The implication is, presumably, that they might be resolvable within the context of some other socio-economic system. On the other hand we learn that liberal societies are progressively overcoming those inequalities which are grounded in convention rather than nature:

We may interpret Kojève's remark that post-war America had in effect achieved Marx's 'classless society' in these terms: not that all social inequality was eliminated, but that those barriers which remained were in some respect 'necessary and ineradicable', due to the nature of things rather than the will of man.⁶⁶

In keeping with this line of thought there is the claim that the egalitarian passions in American society exist because of, and not despite, 'the smallness of its actual remaining inequalities'.⁶⁷ In keeping with the first there is an eloquent description of 'the situation of the so-called black "underclass" in contemporary America'. It is one of a deprivation to which 'achievement of full legal equality for blacks and the opportunities provided by the US economy will not make terribly much difference'.⁶⁸ It is, that is to say, a situation in which both the pillars of Fukuyama's world-view, liberal democracy and capitalism, prove to be ineffective. Thus, in the space of a few pages, the inequalities in liberal societies are trivialized and depicted seriously, said to be unresolvable by such societies and said to be on the way to resolution by them in so far as that is humanly possible. These conflicting tendencies may indicate some uneasiness on Fukuyama's part in meeting the charge from the Left. What is wholly consistent is his resolve that, however it is to be met, it ranks in importance below the counter-charge from the Right that liberal democracies err in recognizing unequal people equally. This pole of criticism is, he insists, 'more powerful', 'greater and ultimately more serious', and 'more profound'.⁶⁹ It leads directly into the vein of Nietzschean, elitist speculation on the low spiritual state of the 'last men' which bulks so large towards the end of the book. Yet Fukuyama may well have good

⁶⁴ EH, p. 289.

⁶⁵ EH, p. 289.

⁶⁶ EH, p. 291.

⁶⁷ EH, p. 295.

⁶⁸ EH, pp. 291-92.

⁶⁹ EH, pp. XXII, 299, 300.

grounds for being uneasy when confronting the egalitarian case. For the rank ordering of problems he adopts in response is not endorsed or warranted by his mentors, Hegel and Kojève, nor does it accord with the character of his borrowings from them.

Following the Argument Where it Heads—a Classless Society

This is most readily shown by returning to what is for Kojève, and following him Fukuyama, the *locus classicus* of the recognition theme in order to expand the remarks made earlier. It is all too obvious that in the master-slave relationship there is no recognition available to the slave. The loss of humanity in that status precludes it utterly. Much more interesting is Hegel's insight that it is this very same factor which ensures that the master cannot be satisfied either. For the value of recognition derives from, and cannot transcend, its source, and recognition by a being who lacks all human worth and dignity is itself nugatory. As Hegel explains, this 'one-sided and unequal' recognition does not suffice for 'recognition proper'. The master can never achieve satisfaction, in Hegelian terms the certainty of 'the truth of himself', through the relationship with a 'dependent' consciousness.⁷⁰ This is the character of the particular contradiction of desire in which the master is trapped. His plight takes on another aspect when one notes that recognition by such a consciousness must be, or must be under a fixed and vitiating presumption of being, enforced just in virtue of the fact of dependency, of the relation of subordination and dominance. As Kojève saw clearly, it is of the essence of the distinctively human desire for recognition that it is a desire 'for a desire', for what cannot by its nature be commanded from without but must arise as an inner determination of the self, that is as something freely given. Here, as generally elsewhere, equality is not opposed to freedom but is rather a precondition of it, and freedom in its turn, it now appears, is internally linked to the ability to provide satisfactory recognition. Since these are all properties that admit of degrees the situation may be conceived in terms of a continuum. At one extreme, in the gross inequality of master and slave, there is both complete subjection of one being to another and complete absence of meaningful recognition. At the other there is the free, self-determined mutual recognition of equals, embodying what are for these purposes the very lineaments of gratified desire. In between the quality of recognition varies inversely with the inequality of the recognizers. The point may be put more formally by saying that equality is a condition of the possibility of 'recognition proper'. To put it in this way is to offer a kind of transcendental argument for the principle of equality in the context of the human practice of giving and receiving recognition.⁷¹ It reveals a presupposition of that practice, both a requirement of its intelligibility and a commitment that has to be taken on by anyone who engages seriously with it. Hence it is that the true meaning of the master-slave dialectic, the paradigmatic struggle for recognition, is a radical egalitarianism.

⁷⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trs. A.V. Miller, Oxford 1979, pp. 116–17.

⁷¹ For transcendental arguments generally see Charles Taylor, 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1979, pp. 151–65. For Kojève on the 'Transcendental', see Kojève, pp. 123–24.

It is a meaning from which Hegel himself increasingly shrank as his thought fell into its well-known pattern of a deepening conservatism. The process is reflected in the way the recognition motif loses its force and identity in his later writings. By the time of *The Philosophy of Right* 'recognition' itself has become simply a general term that is appropriate wherever there is any kind of 'being for another'.⁷² It was precisely, however, the strong sense it bears in the *Phenomenology* that Kojève, with a deep insight, had seized on as the cornerstone of his interpretation. From it he derives the doctrine that the master-slave nexus can be dialectically overcome only in 'homogeneity'. This implies, in particular, as he makes clear, a world without 'class strife', indeed without the 'specific differences' of class.⁷³ The doctrine is one which he failed to maintain in a consistent or principled way. In later years, swamped by cynicism and the spirit of accommodation, it surfaces mainly in fatuous remarks such as that cited by Fukuyama about the 'classless society' of the postwar United States.⁷⁴ Yet even here a truth is being acknowledged in a degraded form and with a bad conscience. The truth is that a philosophy of history which puts the human struggle for recognition at its centre is compelled to envisage a society free from the structural inequalities of which class is the type and emblem. For recognition is, as we have seen, an essentially egalitarian concept. To take it seriously is necessarily to be confronted with a vision of a community of free and equal beings in reciprocal relations of acceptance and respect.

The transcendental character of this argument deserves further comment. It seeks to tell us where we get to in the philosophy of history if we start from recognition. As usual in such cases it seems possible to evade the conclusion by declining the starting point, and so an independent grounding of that is needed. To try to provide it would go well beyond the limits of this discussion, though it is not difficult to see where one might look for inspiration and guidance. Most immediately there is the Hegelian system with its manifold resources and large authority. Further off there lies behind the category of recognition, as Fukuyama reminds us in tracing its ancestry, the main weight of our tradition of political theory.⁷⁵ For the centrality of the category is the distinctive contribution of that tradition to the understanding of

⁷² I owe this formulation to Andrew Chitty. It should be noted that even in *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel treats social inequality in a more serious and principled way than does Fukuyama. In society, he insists, 'poverty immediately takes the form of a wrong done to one class (*Klasse*) by another'. It is a wrong which in spite of his best efforts he finds no way to correct and his discussion ends in a most uncharacteristically inconclusive way: 'The important question of how poverty is to be abolished is one of the most disturbing problems which agitate modern society'. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trs. T.M. Knox, Oxford 1967, pp. 277–78.

⁷³ Kojève, pp. 90, 237. Among the specific differences to be overcome Kojève includes those of race. It would not be difficult to extend the argument to include gender also.

⁷⁴ Kojève, 'Note to the Second Edition', p. 161.

⁷⁵ Of all the thinkers mentioned by Fukuyama, it is perhaps Rousseau who has, before Hegel, the deepest understanding of the inner link between recognition and equality: 'It is only in relation to persons whom one values and honours as equals, Rousseau argues, that one can oneself receive that recognition and respect that is truly meaningful, that truly represents one's being honoured as a morally significant being.' N.J.H. Dent, *A Rousseau Dictionary*, Oxford 1992, p. 116; cf. p. 35.

human motivation and behaviour. It may be that Fukuyama's best achievement is to have re-opened in a pressing way the theme of recognition as a subject of inquiry. He has shown here an acute feeling for what is important and fruitful to explore, even if the full consequences of doing so might not be personally acceptable to him. To justify recognition as a starting point would enable one to demonstrate, not merely to deduce transcendently, that history cannot end in authoritarian capitalism, and that would in itself be welcome. That it cannot end in any form of class society and, a fortiori, of capitalism would not be at all congenial to him.

In a general way, of course, it would be difficult to think of a conclusion less in tune with the spirit of our age than one which holds that the concept of the classless society is the key to the direction and goal of history. Even those who might be sympathetic to it as an ideal are likely to be unnerved by a sense of the difficulties, in particular that of envisaging in any concretely intelligible way how we get from here to there. These are what, in different ways, overwhelmed both Hegel and Kojève, and even standing on their shoulders, things are not likely to be easier for us. Yet it would be irrational to assume in advance that the difficulties are wholly intractable. Moreover, there are those who have not been overwhelmed and will stay with us to the end in grappling with them. Such an enterprise would, however, lie still further beyond the limits of present concerns in some realm of social science. For the present it will simply have to be borne in mind when proposing our conclusion that in philosophy we are enjoined to follow the argument wherever it leads. It may be added that even if the philosophy of history cannot allow access to some larger view of our situation we may well not be cut off from such views altogether. It surely has an obligation to say whatever is revealed by its weak and flickering light even in dark times and perhaps in them most of all.